# DEAR GOD, PLEASE DO SOMETHING QUICK!

DECEMBER 7, 1995
CHAPEL, PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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SCRIPTURE
MATTHEW 24:36-44
ISAIAH 64:1-2, ~~11-12~~ 10-12

**"O THAT YOU WOULD TEAR OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN,. . ."**
-ISAIAH 64:1 (NRSV)

SEVERAL YEARS AGO THERE WAS A LITTLE BOOK PUBLISHED WITH THE ENGAGING TITLE CHILDREN'S LETTERS TO GOD. IT IS JUST WHAT THE TITLE SAYS: A COMPILATION OF BRIEF MESSAGES, WRITTEN BY LITTLE CHILDREN, PUTTING INTO WORDS WHATEVER THEY WANTED TO SAY TO GOD. THE LETTERS ARE FULL OF INNOCENCE AND HOPE AND TRUST. SOME OF THEM ARE WISE, AS ONLY CHILDREN CAN BE ON OCCASION.

MY FAVORITE IS PRINTED IN THE LARGE BLOCK LETTERS OF A FIRST-GRADER:

"DEAR GOD,

ARE YOU REAL? SOME PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE IT.

IF YOU ARE, YOU BETTER DO SOMETHING QUICK.

HARRIET ANN"

I THINK THAT HARRIET ANN HAS SAID IT FOR YOU AND ME, AND THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE. I BELIEVE IT IS THE HUMAN PRAYER, PRAYED ON AND OFF THROUGH LIFE, BUT PRAYED WITH PARTICULAR URGENCY WHEN THINGS HAPPEN WHICH ASSAULT US SO DEEPLY ~~OUR~~ OUR VERY FAITH COMES INTO QUESTION; PRAYED ~~WITH URGENCY~~ particularly WHEN THINGS HAPPEN WHICH SIMPLY DON'T MAKE SENSE IF GOD IS REAL.

TERRY ANDERSON HAS WRITTEN A MEMOIR DOCUMENTING HIS EXPERIENCE AS A HOSTAGE FOR SEVEN YEARS, DEN OF LIONS. ANDERSON WAS A REPORTER WITH A. P., LIVING IN

Remember T. A. ? A.P. reporter covering held hostage in Lebanon for 7 years wrote memoir a.

BERUIT. ON MARCH 16, 1985, HE WAS ABDUCTED AND FOR THE NEXT SEVEN YEARS, ALONG WITH OTHER MEN WHOSE NAMES WE CAME TO KNOW - TERRY WAITE, THOMAS SUTHERLAND, THE REVEREND BENJAMIN WEIR, A PRESBYTERIAN MISSION WORKER, FATHER MARTIN JENKO. FOR SEVEN YEARS ANDERSON WAS A HOSTAGE, A ~~PRISONER~~, IN A BLINDFOLD, MOST OF THE TIME CHAINED TO A WALL IN A SERIES OF DARK, DAMP, FILTHY ROOMS. FOR ONE PERIOD OF THREE YEARS, HE NEVER SAW THE SUN. ONE OF THE EXPERIENCES THAT ANDERSON RECORDS IN HIS POWERFUL AND ENGAGING BOOK IS HIS SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. A LAPSED ROMAN CATHOLIC, ANDERSON FOUND HIMSELF THINKING A LOT ABOUT GOD AND FAITH. HE ASKED FOR A BIBLE AND BEGAN TO READ AND REREAD AND WHEN FATHER JENKO AND HE SHARED A CELL, ANDERSON MADE HIS CONFESSION. BUT THROUGHOUT THERE IS A VERY HUMAN STRUG-

GLE, EXPRESSED WITH A NEWS REPORTER'S CLARITY AND DIRECTNESS:

"I REACH SO HARD TO TOUCH GOD, CONCENTRATING, WAITING FOR SOMETHING, SOME ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FROM HIM THAT I EXIST, THAT HE'S LISTENING. I GET BACK ONLY BLANKNESS. ~~LONG NIGHTS. . . MIND SPINNING, THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS WHIRLING, ANGER, FRUSTRATION, PAIN, GUILT.~~

"I CAN'T DO THIS, GOD. I'M FINISHED. I SURRENDER. THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO CHANGE ANYTHING, NOTHING ANYONE CAN DO. AND IT'S JUST GOING TO GO ON, AND I CAN'T DO IT. HELP ME. YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME, SO HELP ME." [P. 75]

~~A FORTY-YEAR-OLD MAN. . . A SIX-YEAR-OLD CHILD.~~ . . "DEAR GOD, YOU BETTER DO SOMETHING QUICK." THEIR PRAYER IS THE HUMAN PRAYER, THE PRAYER EVERY MAN AND WOMAN PRAYS IN SOME WAY OR ANOTHER AT SOME TIME OR ANOTHER.

A POET OF MAGNIFICENT ART AND DEEP INSIGHT WROTE HIS VERSION OF THE PRAYER 2,500 YEARS AGO. . .

"O THAT YOU WOULD TEAR OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN. . . TO MAKE YOUR NAME KNOWN TO YOUR ADVERSARIES."

LIKE TERRY ANDERSON, THE PROPHET IS WRITING ABOUT CAPTIVITY. ONLY HE'S WRITING ABOUT HIS PEOPLE. JUDAH IS BEING HELD HOSTAGE. THE KINGS OF JUDAH HAVE MADE A SERIES OF FOOLISH DECISIONS AND HAVE MANAGED TO INFURIATE BABYLON, ~~THE MOST POWERFUL EMPIRE IN THE REGION~~. FOR TWO YEARS THE BABYLONIAN ARMY LAYS SIEGE TO JERUSALEM. FINALLY, IN 587, THE CITY FALLS. THE CONQUERING BABYLONIANS SMASH THE CITY WALLS, BURN ALL THE MAJOR BUILDINGS, LEVEL THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON AND CARRY OFF INTO EXILE THE ROYAL HOUSE, ~~SEVERAL THOUSAND~~ LEADING CITIZENS, ~~MILITARY PEOPLE, POLITICIANS~~,

A much older version of the prayer goes like this:

You know the story - It's so important we keep telling it - + hearing it + seeing it all over lives

~~PRIESTS, ARTISANS.~~ A GENERATION PASSES. in exile.

"HOW CAN WE SING THE LORD'S SONG IN A FOREIGN LAND?" THE PEOPLE LAMENT. "WHY HAS THIS HAPPENED TO GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE? WHY DOESN'T GOD DO SOMETHING? WHY ARE WE SUFFERING, PERSECUTED, HUMILIATED? WHY DOESN'T GOD AT LEAST SAY SOMETHING?"

ARE THERE MORE POIGNANT LINES ANYWHERE?

"OUR HOLY AND BEAUTIFUL HOUSE,
WHERE OUR ANCESTORS PRAISED YOU.
~~YOU,~~
HAS BEEN BURNED BY FIRE,
AND ALL OUR PLEASANT PLACES
~~HAVE~~
HAVE BECOME RUINS.
AFTER ALL THIS, WILL YOU
~~RESTRAIN~~
Restrain
YOURSELF, O LORD?
WILL YOU KEEP SILENT. . .?"

[Isaiah 64:11, 12]

The absence of God, the silence of God, the weakness of God, who doesn't know about it?

Every year it seems, during Advent, a series of crises erupts into the consciousness and schedule and late night ruminations of the pastor and he/she prays the prayer with no little urgency. Dear God, Are you real? Do something quick!

A young man, Ethan Kane, from Lincoln Park two miles from Fourth Presbyterian Church, a junior at Loyola, bright, committed, athlete -- comes home from a night on the town last Saturday, is accosted as he parks his van, argues and struggles -- and is shot in the head five times.

Shawn's surgery is too brief. It has metastasized. She's 29.

The surgeon comm to the wait room - too soon -

MY OLDEST FRIEND AND MOST IMPORTANT ~~MENTOR~~ MENTOR, ART ROMIG, SON OF MISSIONARIES, A MISSIONARY TO CHINA, A P.O.W., A GRADUATE OF THIS INSTITUTION, TAKING CARE OF HIS WIFE IN SANTA FE, IS GASPING INTO HIS OXYGEN MASK, FIGHTING ALS, LOU GEHRIG'S DISEASE.

DEAR GOD: DO SOMETHING... WHO HASN'T PRAYED THAT PRAYER?

ONE WHO HAS AND WHO HAS WRITTEN ELOQUENTLY ABOUT IT IS ANN WEEMS, ~~ONE OF OUR~~ A PRESBYTERIAN WRITER WHOSE POEMS AND PRAYERS WE HAVE COME TO LOVE. ANN ~~WEEMS~~ LOST A BELOVED SON AND POURS OUT HER BROKEN HEART IN A NEW BOOK, PSALMS OF LAMENT.

"O GOD HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN MY NAME?
HOW LONG WILL YOU LEAVE ME IN THIS PIT?
DON'T YOU HEAR ME
YOU WHOSE NAME IS EMMANUEL?

WON'T YOU COME TO ME?
HOW LONG MUST I WAIT
ON THIS BED OF PAIN
WITHOUT A CANDLE
TO WARD OFF THE NIGHT?" [P. 12]

"O GOD, YOU'VE ALLOWED DEATH TO TAKE HIM AWAY,
~~LEAVE~~ Leaving ME ALONE
IN THE CHILL DAWN OF UNFINISHED LOVE.
WHAT COULD YOU HAVE BEEN THINKING?" [P. 12]

SOONER OR LATER LIFE BRINGS US TO SUCH A PLACE AND BRINGS SUCH A PRAYER TO OUR LIPS. IF WE KNOW ANYTHING, YOU AND I, IT IS THAT THERE IS THAT THERE IS NO EASY ANSWER. WHILE HARRIET ANN'S PRAYER IS ELOQUENTLY SIMPLE, IT RAISES A QUESTION THAT DOES NOT SUBMIT TO SUPERFICIAL, SIMPLE PIETY.

AS THE ANCIENT PROPHET STRUGGLES WITH THE ISSUE, TWO THOUGHTS BEGIN TO EMERGE AND THEY ARE PERHAPS THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL IDEAS IN THE HISTORY OF HUMAN THOUGHT.

THE FIRST IS THAT GOD DOESN'T CAUSE HUMAN SUFFERING, OR PREVENT IT, OR FOR THAT MATTER, EXPLAIN IT. GOD SHARES IT, ENTERS INTO IT. GOD, THIS POET SUGGESTED NEARLY 600 YEARS BEFORE CHRIST, ENTERS SO DEEPLY INTO THE HUMAN SITUATION, THAT WHAT HAPPENS TO HUMAN BEINGS HAS AN EFFECT ON GOD. GOD ASSUMES THE BURDEN OF SUFFERING. GOD'S REPRESENTATIVE IS A "SUFFERING SERVANT." IT WAS, AND IS, A REMARKABLE THOUGHT: A GOD WHO IS VULNERABLE; A GOD WHO, FOR LOVE, BECOMES VULNERABLE; A GOD WHO ACCEPTS, AND EXPERIENCES THE SAME SUFFERING AND LOSS AND GRIEF WHICH AFFLICT HUMAN BEINGS; A GOD WHOSE PROMINENT CHARACTER-

ISTICS, THEREFORE, CAN NO LONGER BE DESCRIBED EXCLUSIVELY AS POWER, MIGHT, JUDGMENT, STRENGTH, BUT NOW COMPASSION, KINDNESS, MERCY AND LOVE; A GOD, THEREFORE, WHO DOES NOT BANISH SUFFERING, BUT STANDS SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH US IN ITS MIDST, AND HOLDS US UP AND LIFTS US WHEN WE BEGIN TO FALL AND STRENGTHENS US TO LIVE THROUGH IT.

AND THE SECOND IDEA IS THAT EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE MOST DISTRESSING CIRCUMSTANCES, THERE ARE SIGNS OF HOPE. GOD, THOUGH VULNERABLE, IS ALSO ALWAYS PRESENT TO CREATE THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW LIFE AND REDEMPTION. THE PROPHET COULD SEE THINGS THE CAPTIVES COULD NOT SEE: LIBERATION WAS COMING, FREEDOM, RESTORATION, A HIGHWAY IN THE DESERT: A NEW CREATION:

A NEW JERUSALEM, WITH NO MORE WEEPING,

NO MORE INFANTS DYING

NO MORE ELDERLY DYING BEFORE THEIR TIME

EVEN THE WOLF AND THE LAMB WILL FEED TOGETHER

THE WORD FOR THE CHURCH, THE WORD THE CHURCH HAS FOR THE WORLD, THE FAITH ISSUE IN ADVENT IS A WORD OF HOPE, NOT A PIOUS SENTIMENT, NOT A WISTFUL, WISHFUL "WHAT IF..." BUT HOPE PRECISELY IN THE MIDST OF DESPAIR, LIGHT PRECISELY IN THE MIDST OF A THICK DARKNESS.

THE FAITH ISSUE IS NOT "DO YOU BELIEVE JESUS WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM?" EVERYBODY IS CAPTIVATED BY THAT PART OF THE STORY. EVEN BLOOMINGDALES BELIEVES SOMETHING OF SIGNIFICANCE, AND VALUE HAPPENED IN BETHLEHEM. THE ISSUE IS, DO YOU TRUST GOD TO BRING ~~SIGNS OF HOPE AND~~ RESTORATION INTO OUR WORLD, OUR DARKNESS.



The issue is: are you ready to see it - + then to act: to begin to live in the new truth ?

HOPE REQUIRES A DECISION, A COMMITMENT. PEOPLE OF HOPE, JURGEN MOLTMANN WROTE IN AN IMPORTANT BOOK THAT CAME ALONG IN 1967, JUST AT THE RIGHT TIME FOR MANY OF US, ARE NOT INCLINED TO BE PASSIVE ONLOOKERS, BUT ENERGETIC, INVOLVED, SOMETIMES EVEN REVOLUTIONARY.

When it seemed that the culture was dying or already dead — + the church was far behind

IT'S ADVENT. MAYBE THERE ARE ENOUGH PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN GOD AND TRUST THE HOPE, PEOPLE WHO KNOW THAT GOD IS ALWAYS PLANTING THE SEEDS OF A NEW CREATION AND BEARING CHILDREN OF HOPE -- WHO WILL NOT MERELY WATCH AND WAIT, BUT WILL GO TO WORK IN THE NAME OF HOPE -- PEOPLE WHO WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE BRING OUR CULTURE, OUR NATION, OUR CITIES HOME FROM their tragic CAPTIVITY TO VIOLENCE AND POVERTY AND DRUGS, PEOPLE WHO IN THE NAME -- NOT OF ANYBODY'S POLITICAL AGENDA, BUT THE NAME OF THE GOD ~~OF HOPE~~ WILL NOT REST UNTIL THERE IS SOMETHING RESEMBLING HOPE



The Contract w/ America

or

The Contract w/ the Family

but in the name

of

justice
IN OUR SCHOOLS AND COMPASSION IN OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM.

THE TRUTH IS GOD DID NOT RIP OPEN THE SKY AND REACH DOWN AND LIFT ~~JUDAH~~ Israel FROM ITS BABYLONIAN GHETTO.

THE TRUTH IS GOD INVITED THE PEOPLE TO LIFT UP THEIR HEADS AND OPEN THEIR EYES AND START WATCHING FOR SIGNS OF HOPE. (X) THE TRUTH IS GOD INVITES THEM, ~~ON THE BASIS OF THESE SIGNS OF HOPE~~, TO START A JOURNEY BACK THROUGH THE DESERT, A JOURNEY WITH NO SMALL RISK AND DANGER AND DEMAND.

and pack their bags for a journey

GOD DOES NOT PROMISE TO FIX EVERYTHING, BUT TO BE WITH THEM, TO GIVE THEM STRENGTH AND COURAGE FOR THE JOURNEY.

THE TRUTH IS GOD DOESN'T RIP OPEN THE WALLS OF TERRY ANDERSON'S CELL. BUT SOMEHOW GOD GIVES HIM ENOUGH HOPE, TO CALL OUT OF HIM HIS COURAGE AND TRUST. →



God doesn't give Ann Weems her son back — but as Christmas approaches — she sees + hears — again — the ~~God~~ Word of hope — + falls ?

PLEASE, HOLY ONE,

BE BORN ANEW TO ME.

GLORY TO YOU, O GOD.

GLORY TO YOU IN THE HIGHEST

FOR YOU ARE NOT ASHAMED

TO WALK WITH ME IN DARKNESS.

YOU HAVE HEARD MY CRY AND TURNED TO ME,

AND I HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT."

ON DECEMBER 13, 1943, ANOTHER PRISONER WROTE FROM CAPTIVITY. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, IN A LOVE LETTER TO HIS FIANCE, MARIA VON WEDEMEYER, EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THE RELEASE AND REUNION WITH HIS BELOVED AND HIS FAMILY THAT HE HOPED FOR AND EXPECTED WAS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN.

"WITHOUT ABANDONING ALL HOPE" HE WROTE, "WE SHALL BOTH EXPERIENCE A FEW DARK HOURS... WE SHALL PONDER THE

INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF OUR LOT ~~AND BE ASSAILED BY THE QUESTION OF WHY~~ ... How HARD IT IS TO ACCEPT WHAT DEFIES OUR UNDERSTANDING ... HOW GREAT THE TEMPTATION TO FEEL OURSELVES AT THE MERCY OF ~~BELIEVED~~ BLIND CHANCE ...

"And then, just when everything is bearing down on us to such an extent that we can barely stand it, the Christmas message comes to tell us that all our ideas are wrong, and that what we take to be evil and dark is really good and light ... Our eyes are at fault, that is all ... God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, ~~succor in abandonment.~~ No evil can befall us, whatever men may do us."

[p. 133]

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.

DEAR GOD, YOU BETTER DO SOMETHING QUICK ...

GOD HEARS THOSE PRAYERS. GOD HEARS YOU WHEN YOU PRAY THOSE PRAYERS. GOD COMES TO YOU AND ME WHEN WE FIND THOSE PRAYERS ON OUR LIPS.

HOW CAN I SAY THAT? HOW CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT? BECAUSE GOD HAS COME -- IN A STABLE, BEHIND A CROWDED INN, IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA.

BECAUSE GOD CHOSE TO ANSWER THE ANCIENT PRAYER QUIETLY, IN HUMAN BIRTH.

BECAUSE THE CHILD GREW AND REFLECTED THE LOVE AND POWER AND GRACE OF GOD IN A WAY WE HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO FORGET, LIVING OUR LIFE, WALKING OUR ROADS, LOVING WITH OUR LOVE, WEEPING OUR TEARS AND FINALLY, ULTIMATELY, DYING OUR DEATH ...

HOW CAN I ASK YOU TO BELIEVE THAT? BECAUSE GOD HAS COME AND COMES AGAIN AND